OPINION

BY SAAD MALOOK

Iqbal's humanism

SIR Muhammad Iqbal's entire philosophical corpus underpins an ardent striving for humanism to build a better society. Iqbal steadfastly believes in human potential and supports a humane approach towards life. His humanism, thus, comprises a cluster of ideas, including human dignity, freedom, equality, friendship, solidarity, and, in general, human development.

Overall, humanism not only emphasises the centrality of humanity but also its sanctity in this world. It requires the removal of major sources of crimes against humanity: sectarianism, terrorism, war, oppression, exploitation, humiliation, exclusion, discrimination, and the violation of human rights. Despite the unprecedented achievements of science and technology in the age of AI, humanity is facing incessant dehumanisation through various means; for instance, the violation of human rights and genocide in Palestine and in held Kashmir by Israel and India are atrocious crimes against humanity.

Iqbal's humanism has metaphysical and ethical aspects. Metaphysically, Iqbal posits selfhood to rescue human individuality, which was lost in pantheism largely propagated by Ibn al-Arabi in the Muslim tradition. Iqbal's selfhood claims that each human is endowed with infinite human potential — rational, creative, moral, political and artistic — which can be developed further.

According to Iqbal, freedom, equality, fraternity, love and dignity are necessary conditions for the development of human individuality. In contrast, repression, inequality, economic dependency, exclusion, exploitation and humiliation thwart development. Significantly, Iqbal anticipated the 'human development programme' in the first quarter of the 20th century, which was later developed and advanced by Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

Ethically, Iqbal's humanism embraces people beyond any racial, cultural, national, or linguistic identity to acquire the moral unity of humanity. In a new year message, Iqbal says, "Only one unity is dependable, and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language". He adds: "Remember, man can be maintained on this earth only by honouring mankind … until the educational forces of the whole world are directed to inculcating in man respect for mankind".

At the 2023 Allama Iqbal Memorial Lecture at Oxford University 'The Geopolitics of Peace in a Post-Western World', American scholar Jeffrey Sachs stated: "Iqbal … offered the goal of Islam as a message for all humanity, not just a message for the believers. He argued that we need to search for rational foundations in science and Islam." Sachs rightly endorsed Iqbal's humanism and his urge for rationality in science and religion. Without the use of rationality, no society can progress.

In *Javed Nama*, Iqbal articulates: "The status of a human being is higher than the heavens"; "The basis of real civilisation is reverence for humanity". He again states, 'Reverence for a human being is humanity; Be aware of the status of the human being; Human beings develop in a firm relationship with each other; "Follow the footsteps of friendship.' This precisely encapsulates Iqbal's philosophy.

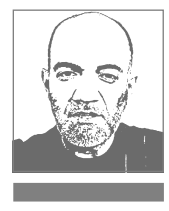
In the preface to *Islam and Open Society,* Charles Taylor writes about Iqbal: "It is the voice of a man who has left behind all identitarian rigidity, who has 'broken all the idols of tribe and caste' to address himself to all human beings. But an unhappy accident has meant that this voice was buried, both in the general forgetting of Islamic modernism and in the very country that he named before its existence, Pakistan, whose multiple rigidities — political, religious, military — constitute a continual refutation of the very essence of his thought." Taylor's judgement is not false because neither the other Muslim countries nor Pakistan take Iqbal's philosophy of humanism seriously to promote human equality.

> Without the use of rationality, no society can progress.

Sectarianism, provincial parochialism and intellectual relativism pose existential challenges for Pakistan. If the challenges are not addressed in time, there will be grave sociopolitical and economic consequences. Political vision, joint commitment and rational decisions are vital to handle the elephant in the room by reforming and strengthening educational institutions, updating madressahs in line with modern education, and promoting dialogue in the public sphere to develop consensus on national and international challenges.

Thus, Iqbal's humanism needs to be adopted in its true spirit, in theory and practice, to respect human diversity, democratic process, freedom of thought, peaceful coexistence, cooperation beyond borders, human rights, social justice, and particularly, to enhance human development for a progressive Pakistan. ■

The writer teaches philosophy at the University of the Punjab, Lahore.



BY AASIM SAJJAD AKHTAR

Oligarchy at work

IT has been almost 20 years since the PML-N and PPP signed the Charter of Democracy in exile. With the Musharraf dictatorship at its zenith, the country's two biggest mainstream parties seemingly realised the significance of collectively resisting militarisation of state and society. Today, both are part of a regime that couldn't care less about 'civilian supremacy'. Only a few months after the passing of the 26th Amendment to clip the tails of an already compromised, anti-people judicial apparatus of state, the government is now gearing up to pass the 27th amendment. This will further cement the security establishment's role as Pakistan's arbiter of power. The 18th Amendment, widely perceived as the biggest success of Pakistan's emaciated democracy in recent times, may also be rolled back.

To put it bluntly, the Charter of Democracy has largely been consigned to the dustbin of history, effectively replaced by a 'Charter of Oligarchy'. Barely two years after a dubious electoral exercise that brought the current regime into existence, Pakistan's political order is further than ever from representing the will of its people. What do I mean by a 'Charter of Oligarchy'? Many associate oligarchy with the domination of political dynasties like the Bhuttos and Sharifs. In a similar vein, the security establishment's centrality to the structure of power tends to be reduced to the current top brass. The rot actually runs much deeper.

More than 50 years ago, Pakistan's most celebrated Marxist thinker Hamza Alavi theorised class rule in Pakistan as being the preserve of landowners, big business and global capital, with what he called the 'bureaucratic-military oligarchy' playing the role of ultimate arbiter. While Alavi's insights need considerable amendments, the basic skeleton of power that he described is very much intact in contemporary Pakistan.

Unelected, bureaucratic state apparatuses remain at the top of the pile. Alongside coercive powers, they articulate an autonomous agenda of profit maximisation through official 'development' projects, as well as a vast corporate empire including real estate, construction, logistics, banking and other business initiatives. The establishment shares economic interests with the propertied landed, business and foreign capitalist classes. Put differently, mainstream political parties are not guided by a foundational economic agenda — meeting the needs of Pakistan's working masses — that is at odds with the 'bureaucratic-military oligarchy'.

The high stakes of the political-economic game certainly generate conflict between various segments of the ruling order but the establishment remains more coherent than any other player, thus maintaining its role of arbiter. Meanwhile the propertied classes, which dominate all mainstream political parties, don't want 'civilian supremacy' enough to remain out of governmental power for too long. So they wax lyrical about democracy, the plight of the peripheries and working masses when in the opposition, then cut a deal with the establishment to find a way back into power.

The Charter of Democracy was largely silent about the underlying economic logics of the militarised power structure. These logics do not determine everything, but are as important as any other aspect of the game of thrones. The question is how to transcend the palace intrigues masquerading as democracy. A comparison with a not dissimilar oligarchic context may help. Zohran Mamdani's victory in New York City's mayoral election has electrified Pakistanis. He is young, proudly owns his Muslim-Indian-Ugandan heritage and speaks to arguably the world's most ethnically diverse city. But arguably, the single biggest reason for Mamdani's triumph is his explicit socialist agenda focusing on the needs of working people in opposition to the barons of Wall Street. Mamdani also speaks truth to Zionists, and the Trumpian White House. He names many shades of the US oligarchy, including the establishment within the Democratic Party itself. Time will tell whether or not he can deliver on his ideals. But the point is that there really is no democracy without challenging the oligarchy that dominates existing power structures.

> The Charter of Democracy has been consigned to the dustbin.

The responses to Mamdani's victory in Pakistan have largely been tragicomic. The PPP has been reciting its *roti*, *kapra*, *makan* mantra, not mentioning that it has shown no commitment to socialism or challenged the establishment for at least a generation. PTI supporters have given to declaring Imran Khan the Pakistani Mamdani. Others are bashing Pakistani Marxists as irrelevant. Beyond the banter, a meaningful analysis of Pakistan's structure of power is the bare minimum to democratise it. Challenging capitalist robber barons comes next. ■

The writer teaches at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

Sectarian harmony

ISLAMABAD: The interprovincial auqaf conference held here today [Nov 6] decided that the minimum pay scales of all the qualified and whole time Khatibs and Moazzins be up-graded from grade 4 and 2 respectively to grades 9 and 4… . The conference reviewed the inter-sectarian situation in the country and expressed satisfaction over the fact that inter-sectarian harmony and peace have greatly improved in the country and no untoward incident has come to the notice of the Government. The conference, however, suggested to the provincial administrations to form permanent peace committees at districts level in order to further improve harmony among various sections of society. The role played by the provincial auqaf departments in [defusing] situation arising out of sectarian differences early this year was appreciated by the conference.

The conference also discussed ... the steps to be taken for maintenance of the sanctity of the shrines in the country. It was decided that attendance of dancing girls, gambling, taking intoxicants and holding of circus etc within the vicinity of the mazars on the occasion of annual 'Urs' should be completely banned. — News agencies

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

'Sole concern of China'

KALIMPONG: The Chinese Government have asked the Bharati Government to withdraw Bharati troops stationed in Gyantse and Yatung, on the trade route from Bharat to Lhasa, capital of Tibet, according to a Peking Radio broadcast ... today [Nov 6], says [the Press Trust of India]. The broadcast said the Chinese Government had expressed the view that it was no longer necessary for Bharati troops to remain in Gyantse and Yatung, as Tibet had become "the sole concern and responsibility of China".

A Bharati Government spokesman here said he had no knowledge of a Chinese request for the withdrawal of troops from the two trade centres where Bharati trade agents are posted. Bharati troops are stationed [at] Gyantse and Yatung under the treaty between Tibet and Britain, then the ruling power in India. Signed in 1906, the agreement was reaffirmed in 1910.

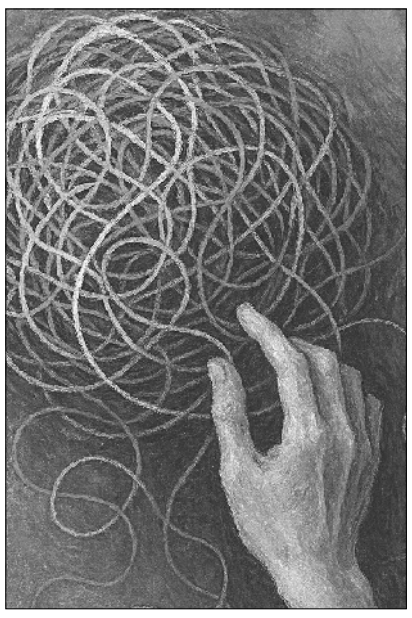
[Meanwhile, according to news agencies in London,] the world has 250,000,000 starving children, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation ... reported … today [Nov 6]. In Europe, 60,000,000 children in 12 different countries are in need of help, mainly as a result of the war, it added.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

A change every few years is frustrating



THIS is with reference to the report 'Talk of 27th Amendment out in the open' (Nov 4), which, among other things, quoted Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as saying that the government was working on a new package under the proposed 27th Amendment to the Constitution, and had sought PPP support in this regard.

The proposed amendment includes some major steps — such as the establishment of a constitutional court, the return of executive magistrates, a new procedure for the transfer of judges, a review of the provinces' shares in the National Finance Commission (NFC) award, changes to Article 243, and the return of education and population planning sectors to the federal domain.

At first glance, these changes may seem administrative in nature, but the reality is that the matter is much more serious than that. Was the Constitution designed to be changed every time there was a need to readjust the balance of power? Was it not intended to be a permanent and sacred document that would define the legality or illegality of anyone's desire for a readjustment? These are fundamental questions.

The Constitution was drafted in 1973. In the last about 52 years, it has already undergone 26 amendments; one amendment every two years. And now, there is a clamour for one more. This pace shows that we consider the Constitution to be a political tool rather than a permanent and stable document.

Each government changes it to match its needs and interests, and then the next government changes it again. In this way, the continuity, credibility and stability of the country's Constitution are lost.

A constitution happens to be a document that is supposed to guarantee the welfare of the nation through a calculated balance of powers among institutions. When it is repeatedly tampered with, distrust arises in the structure of the state.

As this cycle is repeated, institutions clash with each other, the concerns of the provinces increase, and the public feels that the Constitution is written only to serve the interests of the powerful.

Repeatedly amending the constitution will not strengthen the country; it will weaken it. Change, in fact, is beneficial when it is for the needs of the people, not for political expediency. Pakistan does not need new amendments. What it needs is respect for the Constitution.

Aaqib Uddin Mahesar
Karachi

Lack of impartiality

THE five-year tenure of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) parliament is due to end in July 2026. While the move for an in-house change of AJK prime minister is constitutional, the process being followed raises many questions.

The office of the President of Pakistan, as per the 1973 Constitution, is that of the 'head of the state', representing the unity of the federation and conducting all functions with due impartiality. The political meeting that took place in the President House recently, where a change in AJK was discussed, created doubts about the impartiality of the presidency. Any person holding that office needs to be discreet in such matters.

The party chairperson should have held such a meeting at any location except the presidency. It is unfortunate that inpartiality was compromised just like it was compromised during the tenure of the last person who held the office of the President of Pakistan.

Malik Tariq Ali
Lahore

A strange mindset

SINCE the last local government (LG) elections in Karachi, the area of Gulshan-i-Iqbal Block 13-A has become uninhabitable for the area residents. The elections saw a religio-political party winning a seat in the area.

Immediately, the area's public park became the hub of the party's activities, with the union council (UC) chairman establishing his office right there. It was earlier demolished by the government as an illegal structure, but now it has been turned into the office of an 'elected' representative, and nobody can do anything about it anymore.

The public park is now serving party sympathisers exclusively. During Ramazan, the party holds Taraweeh in the park with less than a dozen 'followers' in attendance. Even after the prayers are over, the cleric keeps delivering sermons using huge loudspeakers till midnight. This is despite the fact that the area has at least four mosques. Obviously, the purpose is a display of self-righteousness rather than the prayers.

When it is a national occasion, like the Independence Day, loud music becomes the order of the day. During its week-long show of solidarity with people of Gaza, songs were played all day long. The park is also being used by party workers for chicken farming, with a caretaker appointed to take care of the chickens.

I am a senior citizen with a completely apolitical orientation. I am told that the actions of the said party, led by the UC chairman, are only meant to annoy the residents because the area was considered a stronghold of a rival political party till before the LG elections.

When people raise objections to noise pollution in the area, the UC chairman simply advises them to blame his predecessors — his political rivals — for not having done enough for the wellbeing of the residents.

What is needed is ruthless accountability of all public officials, political or otherwise, who consider themselves above the law, and use public places as their fiefdoms. They continue to bully and victimise the very people they are supposed to serve.

Dr Asif Ahmad
Karachi

Stipend controversy

THE Punjab government is said to have decided to provide a monthly stipend of Rs25,000 to prayer-leaders across the province. On the surface, the initiative seems like a positive step, but there has been a lot of unnecessary debate in social and political circles over the matter, with even Maulana Fazlur Rehman chipping in with his objections.

The recent decision traces its roots to the Muridke incident last month, which heightened concerns regarding religious and public security. After the incident, the government launched a crackdown on the workers of a religious party.

While initially focused on a single party, action was extended to some others as well. Amid a tense environment, a former head of the Ruet-i-Hilal committee played an active role in mediating between the clergy and the government. His efforts did lead to an agreement. Following these developments, the government in Punjab announced the decision related to the monthly stipend of prayer-leaders.

While there are a number of reasons to welcome the move, some political and religious leaders have expressed strong objections, arguing that the stipend was an attempt to buy the loyalty of religious leaders.

As I see it, the actual question is not whether stipends should be provided, but why such measures were not implemented years ago.

A pre-emptive framework for mosque administration, monitoring, as well as regulation of inflammatory speech could have effectively prevented all the controversies that we are watching unfold today.

Hayan Ahmed Khan
Islamabad

PCB could do better

THIS is with reference to the report "Wazir Mohammad, Pakistan's oldest living Test cricketer, is no more" (Oct 14). The country's longest living Test cricketer passed away in the United Kingdom aged 95 years, and all that the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) did was to issue a rather mundane condolence message.

Unfortunately, the board's statement simply expressed sorrow and offered condolences, but lacked any broader gesture, such as a moment silence, or the wearing of black armbands by players even though Pakistan and South Africa were engaged in a Test match at Lahore at the time.

The women's cricket World Cup semi-final between India and Australia saw both teams wearing black armbands in deference to the late Ben Austin, a promising Australian teenage cricketer who died on Oct 30 after being struck on the neck by a ball in training camp in Melbourne. Though Austin was not a mainstream player, the display of black armbands by the two teams exemplified the true spirit of the game by honouring him in the best possible way.

Institutions, like the PCB, carry the responsibility not only of managing the day-to-day affairs, but of preserving and honouring the heritage of the sport, especially when it involves figures who shaped its early identity.

By issuing only a modest statement, rather than elevating the tribute to match the significance, the board missed an opportunity to show genuine respect and enrich public memory of Wazir's great contributions to Pakistan cricket in its early days.

Someone of the stature of Wazir, who served as a bridge between eras and a symbol of Pakistan's cricketing roots, deserved more than a condolence note.

Fawad Hashmey
Lahore

▶ **SEEKING HELP:** A bright young man, a gold medalist from Lasbela University, is currently facing a severe health crisis, battling a serious illness. Despite his outstanding academic achievements, Bahar Ali lacks the financial means to afford proper medical treatment, which he is in dire need of at present. The provincialgovernment,philanthropistsandeducational institutions need to step forward. This is not just a call for financial help, but a moral responsibility to stand with our youth. Let us unite under the spirit of humanity, and ensure that no talented student is left helpless in times of need.
Gohar-e-Bahar
Kech

▶ **UNHEALTHY BREAKFAST:** On the occasion of the World Heart Day this year, a leading university hospital organised a bicycle rally to promote healthy living. Such initiatives play a vital role in raising awareness about cardiovascular health. However, the choice of *halwa puri* as the breakfast at the end of the rally sent a contradictory message. Being rich in saturated fat and cholesterol, *halwa puri* happens to be among the very foods that are linked to cardiac problems. Future events should set a stronger example by offering fruits, whole-grain foods, or fresh juices to promote heart-friendly choices. Consistency between message and action is essential if awareness campaigns are to inspire real change.
Nafis Khan
Sydney, Australia

▶ **IDEAL LIFE:** Using high-end products and flaunting them have become a new trend. For each individual buying a new designer bag, there is at least one who is struggling to make ends meet. Witnessing this continuous demonstration of affluence can make people feel stressed. The silent pressure has the potential to force young people towards debts and their severe consequences. We must understand that our worth is not defined by what we own. It is wise to live below one's means, value one's possessions, and know that a good life has solid foundations in real experience and genuine relations; not in price tags.
Laiba Adnan
Karachi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
Email: dawnombudsman@gmail.com